

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
February 16, 2022**

INVOCATION / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

BUSINESS ITEMS (including amendments and rescissions):

1. Approval of Agenda
2. COVID-19 Update and Review of Mask Policy

The Transylvania County Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, February 16, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. at the Morris Education Center. The purpose of the meeting was to receive updated COVID-19 data and information and review the school district's current COVID-19 policies and protocols. Chairman McCoy led in a moment of silence and Ron Kiviniemi led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman McCoy called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. In addition to approximately 11 guests, the following individuals were in attendance.

BOARD MEMBERS:

Tawny McCoy, Chair
Ron Kiviniemi, Vice Chair
Courtney Domokur
Marty Griffin
Kimsey Jackson

BOARD ATTORNEY:

Kris Caudle, Campbell Shatley

MEDIA:

Jordon Morgan, Transylvania Times

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant
Dr. Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent
Carrie Norris, Director, K-8 Education
Missy Ellenberger, Director, 9-12 Education
Audrey Reneau, Director, Federal Programs
Jen Heatherly, Public Information Officer
Chris Whitlock, Director, Technology Services
Stephen Shields, Technology Specialist
Tyler Snipes, School Resource Officer
David Wright, School Resource Officer
Greg Stroup, School Resource Officer

1. Approval of Agenda

ON A MOTION BY MR. JACKSON, SECONDED BY MRS. DOMOKUR, the meeting agenda for February 16, 2022 was unanimously approved.

2. COVID-19 Update and Review of Mask Policy

Dr. Brian Weaver gave an update on the number of COVID-19 cases in the schools. After a spike in December and January, the number of cases have decreased significantly since the end of January. There are new changes to the state *Toolkit* guidance regarding quarantine and isolation protocols effective February 21, 2022.

Mr. Kiviniemi reported that the district's data trends show that increases in COVID cases have occurred during times that masks were optional. He expects to see cases peak again should masks return to optional. Mrs. Domokur stated that she is glad to see the state guidance for quarantine/isolation protocols change so that students do not have to miss as many days. Chairman McCoy stated that she is concerned about the students who had to stay home due to exposures who never developed COVID. She feels that the new *Toolkit* guidance will help eliminate that. She also cautioned that a child who is sick (whether COVID or other illness) should stay at home regardless. She remarked that the board's last vote to require masks was based in part on the large number of staff members who were out. Mr. Kiviniemi asked what the board would consider to be an acceptable level of cases among students and staff. Mr. Griffin pointed out that increasing vaccination rates would help reduce COVID cases. Mrs. Domokur stated that

numbers are declining in the county and statewide. Unless a new variant emerges, she does not expect to see the numbers go back up. Mr. Griffin pointed out that 98 out of 100 counties in NC still have high transmission rates. Mr. Jackson reported that the General Assembly may try to pass legislation allowing parents to opt out of mandatory mask mandates.

MRS. DOMOKUR MOVED that masks be optional in the schools effective February 17, 2022. MR. JACKSON SECONDED. Mr. Jackson asked what would need to happen for schools to transition to optional masks. Dr. Weaver reported that a message to parents and staff could go out immediately. He added that masks would still be required on school buses due to federal law.

Mr. Kiviniemi stated that the *Toolkit's* new guidelines don't go into effect until February 21; therefore, HE MOVED TO AMEND THE MOTION to be effective on February 21, 2022 and to stipulate that if the number of cases for students and staff exceeds 3%, the district would return to mandatory masks. MR. GRIFFIN SECONDED THE AMENDMENT. Mrs. Domokur objected to having the percentage clause in the motion. Chairman McCoy stated that she feels delaying the change would create confusion. Mr. Jackson objected to "return to mandatory masks" stipulation. Chairman McCoy called for a vote on the amendment. ON A VOTE of 2:3, the amendment failed (FOR: Griffin, Kiviniemi; AGAINST: Domokur, Jackson, McCoy).

MR. GRIFFIN MOVED TO AMEND THE MOTION to make masks optional in the schools effective February 21, 2022. MR. KIVINIEMI SECONDED. Mrs. Domokur stated that delay would be confusing to parents and the numbers are low enough that she is comfortable with starting optional masks tomorrow. Chairman McCoy pointed out that there will be cases of COVID no matter what, and advised everyone to follow common sense guidelines. Mr. Griffin stated that he does not understand what would be confusing about finishing out this week with mandatory masks and starting with optional masks on Monday the 21st. He called for a vote on the amendment. ON A VOTE OF 2:3, the amendment failed (FOR: Griffin, Kiviniemi; AGAINST: Domokur, Jackson, McCoy).

Discussion resumed on the original motion. Mr. Griffin asked if visitors would have to wear masks. Dr. McDaris reported that masking rules for visitors would be the same as for students and staff. Mr. Kiviniemi remarked that he hates wearing masks like everyone else; however, he believes in following the recommendations of public health officials and tries to do so consistently. Mr. Griffin called the question. ON A VOTE OF 3:2, the motion passed (FOR: Domokur, Jackson, McCoy; AGAINST: Griffin, Kiviniemi). Masks will be optional for students, staff, and visitors in all school facilities effective February 17, 2022. Chairman McCoy repeated her advice that parents not send sick children to school.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MR. GRIFFIN, SECONDED BY MRS. DOMOKUR, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary